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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE PRIORITY 4547
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG PRIORITY 0126
RUEFHLC/HQS DHS WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAHLA/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUMISTA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0137

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 000733

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TAGS: [CVIS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [KCOR](#) [KCRM](#) [CH](#) [DR](#) [HA](#) [HK](#)
SUBJECT: SENIOR DOMINICAN OFFICIALS IMPLICATED IN
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND ALIEN SMUGGLING

Classified By: Michael Meigs, Economic & Political Counselor. Reason:
1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: High-level officials in the Dominican Ministries of Foreign Relations and Migration use their positions to facilitate human trafficking and alien smuggling schemes, according to media reports, DHS investigations and Embassy contacts. Those implicated include the Assistant Secretary of Consular Affairs in the Secretariat of Foreign

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Relations and the Director and Assistant Director of the Directorate of Migration. The smuggled aliens, particularly Chinese and Cuban nationals, use the Dominican Republic as a staging ground in attempts to migrate illegally to the United States. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Growing numbers of Cuban and Chinese nationals are using the Dominican Republic as a staging ground in attempts to reach U.S. territory. The Embassy has received credible allegations that high-level officials in the Dominican Foreign Ministry and Directorate of Migration are facilitating those journeys by knowingly authorizing the entry into Dominican territory of intending U.S. migrants, sometimes in violation of Dominican law.

CUBAN MIGRATION VIA HISPANIOLA

13. (U) The Dominican Republic is located just 70 miles from the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico. The two islands are separated by the Mona Passage in the Caribbean. Dominicans have long taken advantage of their country's proximity to Puerto Rico by operating clandestine illegal migration trips using small boats, or "yolas," to reach the western shore of Puerto Rico.

14. (U) In recent years, growing numbers of Cubans have been joining Dominicans in these dangerous voyages. In these attempts, Cubans have an advantage not enjoyed by Dominican migrants -- they need not travel the entire distance to Puerto Rico. Under the "wet-foot, dry-foot" policy, Cubans who reach U.S. territory are permitted to claim asylum and

remain, while those apprehended at sea may be returned. The island of Mona, a nature reserve that is U.S. territory, lies approximately halfway between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Cubans need only set foot on the island in order to claim asylum and be given permission to remain in the United States.

¶5. (SBU) In FY2001, no more than five Cubans reached Mona island, according to DHS data. However, the number of Cubans attempting the journey has exploded since then, to 318 in FY2004 and 752 in FY2006. The U.S. Coast Guard has apprehended 320 Cubans at sea in the Mona Passage over the first five months of FY2007.

CHINESE MIGRATION VIA HISPANIOLA

¶6. (C) The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reports that Chinese mafias operating in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic arrange the entry of large numbers of Chinese nationals into Dominican territory. Those Chinese nationals are generally held in a form of indentured servitude in Chinese-owned Dominican businesses while they repay their travel debts. Work conditions can be exploitative. According to DHS, the migrants' families in China are essentially held hostage in order to ensure repayment.

¶7. (C) Once their debts are paid off, DHS reports, the migrants are either smuggled to U.S. territory via air or as stowaways on board merchant vessels, or are given transportation to Central America, where they attempt to make the crossing to the United States via land. Due to the level of risk involved in the journey, Chinese nationals do not generally attempt to cross the Mona Passage via yola.

¶8. (C) One Embassy contact and business owner in the local Chinese community confirmed the operation of multiple Chinese smuggling outfits throughout the Dominican territory. He stated that many migrants arrive in the Dominican Republic and secure local jobs, all the while awaiting the opportunity to obtain passage to the United States. He says that although many of these migrants are smuggled to the United States on board charter flights (especially from Haiti) and merchant vessels, others obtain passage through more legitimate means. Specifically, the contact has the impression that the Embassy's consular section had grown more lenient toward Chinese visa applicants, and that many were able to obtain valid nonimmigrant and immigrant visas through fraudulent documentation or sham marriages.

¶9. (C) DHS is conducting several ongoing investigations into Chinese trafficking organizations here in the Dominican Republic.

HOW THEY ENTER THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

¶10. (SBU) Most Chinese and Cuban nationals tend to enter Dominican territory via air using Dominican travel visas issued abroad. Few of the travelers appear to qualify for those visas. Likewise, few return to their countries of origin.

-- The Role of the Secretariat of Foreign Relations:

¶11. (U) Investigative reporting published this week by newspaper Clave Digital revealed that the Secretariat of Foreign Relations has issued 2,948 30-day travel visas to Chinese nationals over the past two years. According to documents obtained by that newspaper, only 432 of those Chinese nationals have actually returned to their country of origin. The remaining 2,516 travelers, according to the newspaper, either remained illegally in the Dominican

Republic or "used Dominican territory as a bridge" to reach the United States.

¶12. (C) That story stated that most of the visas in question were issued at Dominican consulates in France, Spain, Canada, Peru, Ecuador and Venezuela. Only a minority of the visas were issued at Hong Kong, according to the report. However, the vast majority of such cases that Embassy sources have processed involve visas issued at the Dominican consulate in Hong Kong. According to Embassy contacts in the Chinese community, Dominican consulates overseas, especially in Hong Kong, sell Dominican visas and passports to the highest bidders. Econoff met one Chinese national who freely admitted that he purchased a Dominican passport in Hong Kong because "it made traveling easier."

¶13. (U) However, although the consulates overseas were responsible for printing and issuing the visas in question, the Clave report states that the applications for those visas were made directly through the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs in the Foreign Ministry,

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Rosario Graciano.

¶14. (C) According to Embassy contacts and the Clave story, many of the Chinese visitors are given "investor" or "businessman" visas, even though they clearly do not qualify for these classifications. Often, the visitors are the subjects of petitions by the owners of Chinese fast-food restaurants or short-term hotels in the Dominican Republic -- often the same employers who intend to exploit the petitioners' labor when they arrive.

¶15. (C) The Clave Report was not the first to accuse Assistant Secretary Graciano of facilitating the issuance of visas to intending Cuban and Chinese migrants. During a farewell call on the Ambassador, in February the outgoing director of the local office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Fanny Polania (PROTECT), denounced a procedure facilitating the entry of Cubans that

was remarkably similar to the one outlined in the Clave story. Ms. Polania stated that Rosario Graciano was directly involved in authorizing Dominican consulates to issue visas to Cuban nationals who did not qualify for those visas. Polania said Assistant Secretary Graciano "personally demanded my head on multiple occasions" because she was concerned that the IOM representative posed a threat to her operations.

¶16. (C) Polania also stated that Ms. Graciano's office contacted the Dominican military every time Cuban migrants were interdicted at sea and repatriated to the Dominican Republic. According to Polania, during those conversations the military is instructed to release, without charge or deportation hearings, all of the Cuban migrants who hold valid Dominican visas. Of course, this facilitates their ability to continue trying to cross the passage, and the U.S. Coast Guard confirms that they often see repeat travelers.

-- The Role of the Directorate of Migration

¶17. (U) Last week a news story published in Dominican afternoon tabloid El Nacional stated that U.S. authorities, in conjunction with Dominican agencies, were working to dismantle a network of Chinese traffickers. According to that article, the traffickers smuggled Chinese nationals into Dominican territory from Hong Kong and France using permits issued by the Directorate of Migration. From the Dominican Republic, the smuggled aliens were sent to Panama and Mexico, where they crossed into U.S. territory via land.

¶18. (C) The information published in that story was remarkably similar to that provided by DHS, and it immediately provoked a reaction from Dominican authorities. On the day the story was published, Migration Director Carlos

Amarante Baret went public, blaming the entry of Chinese nationals on the Foreign Ministry. "(The Directorate of) Migration only facilitates the entry of those travelers who are authorized by Foreign Ministry," Amarante said. Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Rosario Graciano also reacted

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swiftly by inviting Acting Consul General Mike Schimmel to lunch, inquiring what he knew about the investigation.

¶19. (C) Amarante has a point -- that the visas in question were issued by the MFA Office of Consular Affairs, rather than by his agency. But Amarante's agency plays a role in the entry of Chinese nationals, too. According both to the Clave report and to DHS investigators, immigration inspectors at the airports are instructed to provide "VIP courtesies" to all Chinese nationals who enter the country. Such courtesies are not extended to travelers of any other nationalities. According to the Clave Report, the Directorate of Migration also issues special "verifications" to airlines that transport Chinese nationals in order to ensure that the travelers are given transportation. Again, such services are reportedly not provided to travelers of any other nationalities. DHS says that these services are provided in order to ensure the transit and entry of travelers who clearly lack the basic qualifications for the visas they have been issued.

¶20. (U) Drafted by Alexander T. Bryan.

¶21. (U) This report and extensive other material can be consulted on our SIPRNET site,
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/>
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